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PARTICIPATION IN BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS AND RELATIONSHIPS TO YOUTH OUTCOMES

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Participation is a key issue in youth development organizations. In fact, research suggests that youths who attend the programs offered by these agencies will experience numerous benefits. One such youth development organization is the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA). Much of the research pertaining to the BGCA examines the importance of participation in structured prevention and educational programs such as Project SMART and Project Learn. The everyday Club participant, however, does not necessarily attend these structured programs. As such, the present study was designed to gain a better understanding of "typical" Club participation and how overall attendance at the Club is related to positive outcomes among youth. A total of 139 youths (aged 10 to 18 years old) participated in the study. Overall participation in the Club and age were both independently related to enhanced academic achievement, as well as increased substance use. Additionally, significant age and participation interaction effects point to the importance of Club participation at nullifying risks and problem behaviors associated with increasing age, particularly in relation to academic outcomes. Implications are discussed pertaining to program strategies that may serve as hooks or magnets that sustain youths' interest and continued involvement in BGCA activities and other youth development programs. © *2003 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.*

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Youth development programs provide important contexts for promoting the positive, healthy development of young people. There are 17,000 youth development organizations, both public and private, active in the United States in the 1990s (Quinn, 1999). Participation in the programs offered by these agencies is associated with positive outcomes for youths. For instance, involvement in high quality after-school programs, as well as in other extracurricular activities, is related to improved school attendance and performance, more involvement with adults, better peer relations, and enhanced prosocial behaviors (Huang, Gribbons, Kim, Lee, & Baker, 2000; Posner, & Vandell, 1994; Riley, Steinberg, Todd, Junge, & McClain, 1994; Schinke, Cole, & Poulin, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). As well, participation is linked with lower incidences of problem behaviors such as decreased academic failure, substance use, and delinquency (Anderson-Butcher, 2000; Holland & Andre, 1987; Larson, 1994; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Posner & Vandell, 1994; Riley et al., 1994; Schinke, Orlandi, & Cole, 1992).

Participation is a key issue in youth development programming (Quinn, 1999). Simply put, if youth do not attend, they will not experience the positive benefits these programs are known to provide. Many challenges to participation exist. For instance, youths' involvement in these programs is typically voluntary, and youths indicate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the activities by "voting with their feet." The desired outcomes of these programs require long-term participation and youths must attend with sufficient frequency and duration. Maintaining this involvement over time is especially challenging among adolescents, as participation tends to decline as youths age (Gould, 1987; Quinn, 1999). Additionally, the way in which youths participate is important, that is, especially in programs offering a variety of activities and programs. To highlight, youths may engage in structured, outcomes-based prevention and educational programs, or may participate in less structured, drop-in recreational based activities. Because of these challenges, it is important for youth development organizations to understand the various factors associated with participation and the outcomes associated with the involvement in the various types of programs offered.

BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS

Many researchers have discussed the importance of participation in activities offered at the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA). The BGCA is a community-based nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the psychosocial development of youths while also inspiring them to become productive and responsive citizens (BGCA, 1998). With over 2,850 Club locations across the country, BGCA provides youths with a safe place to learn, on-going relationships with caring professionals, and life-enhancing programs (BGCA, 1998). The overriding purpose of the organization is to promote positive youth development. Foremost, the BGCA seeks to provide positive and safe places for youths. This youth development strategy guides the activities and programs offered in the BGCA's five core program areas: Character and Leadership Development; Education and Career Development; Health and Life Skills; the Arts; and Sports, Fitness, and Recreation.

More specifically, BGCA programs focus on developing social competence among youth participants through alcohol, drug, and pregnancy prevention; career exploration, citizenship; educational supports; and delinquency and gang prevention (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Fallara, & Furano, 2002; Kaltreider & St. Pierre, 1995; St. Pierre, Kaltreider, Mark, & Aiken, 1992). BGCA also seeks to promote positive youth devel-

opment through less structured programs such as sporting events, recreational games, and health and fitness activities. Cost for participation in BGCA activities are minimal (i.e., some have membership fees that are as low as $5.00/year). BGCA has open door policies, as youth participate on a voluntary and drop-in basis.

Several essential key elements within individual Clubs have been noted. For instance, participants describe the significance of Clubs in providing prosocial peer groups, linkages to adults, and opportunities for leadership (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2002; Kaltreider & St. Pierre, 1995; Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2001). The importance of youths' active involvement, ownership, and interest in the program is noted (see Anderson-Butcher, 2000; Anderson-Butcher et al., 2002; Hirsch, Roffman, Deutsch, Flynn, et al., 2000; Roffman, Pagano, & Hirsch, 2001). As well, enjoyment at the Club is shown to relate to participants' enhanced self-esteem, and positive treatment by Club staff is associated with better emotional and behavioral symptoms (Roffman et al., 2001).

Other researchers explored specific impacts of Club participation on outcomes such as academic achievement and substance use. For instance, Schinke et al. (2000) compared Clubs with Project Learn, a BGCA educational program, Clubs without Project Learn, and generic after-school programs that did not have an educational component. These authors noted that youths attending Clubs with Project Learn were doing better educationally than those youths attending Clubs without Project Learn. Youths attending the Clubs with or without Project Learn fared better academically than youths attending after-school programs without a structured educational component.

St. Pierre and her colleagues (St. Pierre et al., 1992; St. Pierre, Mark, Kaltreider, & Aikin, 1997) provided evidence to support the role of the BGCA's substance use prevention programs, Stay SMART and SMART Kids. Club participants who participated in Stay SMART had enhanced attitudes, knowledge, and refusal skills, and reported less substance use as compared to Club participants who did not attend the structured program. As well, St. Pierre, Mark, Kaltreider, and Aiken (1995) highlighted the importance of the Stay SMART program with an abstinence only focus. Stay SMART plus additional abstinence sessions promoted appropriate behaviors and attitudes toward sexual activity among non-virgin Club participants, compared to Club participants who did not attend the program.

More recently, St. Pierre, Mark, Kaltreider, and Campbell (2001) examined the importance of a multicomponent BGCA program on enhancing protective factors. Youths who attended a structured Club program that included tutoring, recreation, snack, teacher involvement, and SMART Kids prevention programming had better refusal skills, problem solving, courteousness with teachers and school personnel, and ethical behaviors 2 years postprogramming compared to youths who participated in traditional Club programs. Additionally, Schinke et al. (1992) examined the influences of the BGCA's SMART programs. These researchers compared public housing units that had a Club and the SMART prevention program, public housing units with only a traditional Club, and public housing units without Clubs or SMART programs. Findings support the role of Clubs in reducing substance use, drug trafficking, criminal behaviors, and property destruction within the housing units. Little difference was found to support the added effects of SMART within the Clubs, thus suggesting the role of overall involvement in Club programs as opposed to program-specific participation.

Studies examining participation in overall Club programs, compared to participation in more structured programs, are limited. Most of the BGCA research has exam-

ined participation in targeted programs such as SMART prevention and Project Learn educational programs. These more structured programs, however, are not necessarily well attended by the everyday regular Club participant (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2002). In fact, research suggests the contrary. In actuality, recent research found that 6-month daily attendance at the Clubs was strongly related to participation in Club recreational physical activity and sport activities (Anderson-Butcher, 2000). Additionally, many program leaders at Clubs will attest that it is very difficult to get youth to attend the more structured programs offered, such as tutoring, prevention programming, and leadership groups (Anderson-Butcher & Conroy, 2002; Hartzell, 2002).

As a result, research that explores general participation in the overall Club and its impact on youth outcomes is less conclusive. For instance, Anderson-Butcher (2000) found that overall participation in the Clubs had a significant, but small, impact on reducing risk factors among youths. Recently research also has found that overall participation in the Club was not related to child functioning as measured by self-esteem, emotional, or behavioral symptoms, or the extent a child gets in trouble (Roffman et al., 2001). As well, Fashola (1998) concluded that there was little concrete evidence of overall BGCA program effectiveness.

Given the aforementioned issues, little is understood about the specific elements of the BGCA that make it successful (Fashola, 1998; Roffman et al., 2001; Schinke et al., 1992). Several questions remain, as little is known about what the "typical" Club participant does at the Club and how this involvement is related to positive outcomes. Is overall participation in BGCA programs associated with positive outcomes for youths? In other words, will "typical" Club participants accrue benefits from their involvement, compared to youths who do not attend?

The present study is designed in response to these needs. First, we aim to better understand what youths would typically do on a regular basis at the Club. We then explore how certain underlying motivators for attendance (i.e., friends, parents, specific activities, etc.) predict overall Club participation. Once a better understanding of the "typical" Club participation is noted, we then examine how overall participation at the Club is related to enhanced academic achievement and school engagement and decreased substance use.

METHOD

Sample

A total of 150 youths initially participated in the study. Youths were asked "How honest were you in filling out this survey" on a general scale, including: *very honest* (0); *pretty honest* (1), *honest some of the time* (2), *honest once in awhile* (3); and *honest not at all* (4). Youths indicating they were honest "once in awhile" and "not at all" were dropped from the study ($n = 6$), as well as those that did not report answers to this questions ($n = 5$).[1] The final sample included 139 youths. Female (42%) and male (58%) participants ranged in age from 10 to 17 years ($M = 12.02$, $MD = 11$, $SD = 2.3$). The sample was ethnically diverse: 46% of the youths were Hispanic, 35% White, 7%

[1]Follow-up *t*-test analyses indicated no differences between the youths who were honest and those dropped on all outcome variables, as well as age. Chi-square difference tests noted, however, that youths that were dropped were more likely to be male and minorities. There was no difference between groups on single parent family status.

African American, 5% Native American, and 7% Other. Over half of the youths in the study (54%) resided in single-parent families.

Measures

Participation. All youths in the study were asked how many times in the last 7 days they had attended the Club. Ratings were based on a six-point ordinal scale that provided choices including: *none* (0), *one time* (1), *two times* (2), *three times* (3), *four times* (4), *five times* (5), and *six or more times* (6). In a previous study, this self-report measure has been shown to be highly predictive of 6-month program attendance at BGCA programs (Anderson-Butcher, 2000). Responses on this item were recoded to create a monthly participation variable, thus enhancing its utility in comparing its relation to the various 30-day outcome variables measured in this study. For example, a 7-day attendance rate of "one time" was coded as "four times;" whereas "five times" was coded as "twenty times." In turn, responses for overall monthly attendance ranged from 0 to 24 times. Youths were then grouped according to high (n = 44), moderate (n = 58), and low (n = 37) levels of participation based on the distribution of these overall monthly attendance scores.

Motivation for Involvement. Youths that participated in the Club were asked two questions addressing the underlying motivation for participation in the BGCA programs (youths that had never participated in the Club were instructed to skip these two questions). First, study participants were asked, "What do you do at the Boys and Girls Club?" Youths were asked to indicate which of the activities reflected their reasons for attending. Choices included arts and crafts, games room, life skills/prevention programs, service projects, recreation and sports activities, and educational activities. Second, youths were asked "Why do you participate in the Boys & Girls Club." Again, youths could choose from among multiple reasons and could choose more than one answer. Response choices included friends are there, parents make me, for different program components (e.g., sports, art projects, educational support, service projects), and the presence of caring adults at the Club.

Age. Participants provided their age on the survey.

Academic Achievement and School Engagement. Several items from the Utah Division of Substance Abuse Needs Assessment Survey (Social Research Institute, 1997) were used to measure various academic achievement indicators. The instrument is modeled after the Student Survey of Risk and Protective Factors Instrument (Arthur, Pollard, Hawkins, & Catalano, 1997) and was developed in partnership with the Social Development Research Group in Seattle, Washington. As well, the instrument is deemed reliable and valid (O'Donovan, 1996; Social Research Institute, 1997).

Youths were asked five questions related to academic achievement and performance. First, they were asked to describe what their grades were like during the last year. The response scale included: *Mostly, Fs* (1), *Mostly Ds* (2), *Mostly Cs* (3), *Mostly Bs* (4), or *Mostly As* (5). Truancy in school was assessed by asking participants to describe how many days in the last 4 weeks they had "skipped" or "cut" school. The response scale included: *none* (0), *one time* (1), *two times* (2), *three times* (3), *four to five times* (4), *six to 10 times* (5), and *11 or more times* (6). Several items tapped into more general attitudes and perceptions toward school. Youths were asked to indicate how often they "enjoyed

being in school" and "tried to do their best in school" over the past year. Responses were made on the following scale: *Never* (0), *Seldom* (1), *Sometimes* (2), *Often* (3), or *Almost Always* (4). Finally, youths were asked if they believed it was "OK to cheat at school." The response scale included: *NO*! (1), *no* (2), *yes* (3), or *YES*! (4).

Substance Use. The Utah Division of Substance Abuse Needs Assessment Survey (Social Research Institute, 1997) also was utilized to assess substance use. Specifically, 30-day alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use were measured. Youths were asked to rate on how many occasions (if any) they had used alcohol and marijuana in the past 30 days on the following scale: *Never* (0), *1–2 times* (1), *3 to 5 times* (2), *6 to 9 times* (3), *10 to 19 times* (4); *20–39 times* (5); or *40 or more times* (6). Cigarette use during the past 30 days was measured on the following scale: *Not at all* (0); *Less then one cigarette per day*; (1), *One to five cigarettes per day*; (2), *About one-half pack per day*; and (3), *About one pack per day*; (4) *About one and one-half packs per day*; and (5) *Two packs or more per day.* Concurrent and predictive validity of the instrument was established among youths in school settings by examining the scale's relationship to alcohol and drug use (O'Donovan, 1996; Social Research Institute, 1997).

Procedures

One hundred and twenty youths were recruited for participation in the study at an urban Club located in a western community. To collect data on youths who frequented the Club less often, an additional 30 youths were recruited at a local neighborhood apartment complex where many youths that attended the Club resided. The number of youths that participated was determined by ability to recruit this number during a predetermined 2-week data collection period. Interested youths were asked to retrieve consent for their participation from their parents/guardians. The total number of participants ($n = 150$) was determined by the number of youths returning the parent/guardian consent form during this time period.

Once permission was given, the items assessing motivation, participation, academic achievement indicators, and substance use were administered as a part of a larger battery of instruments. Questions on the battery were not randomized. Study procedures were comparable for both youths recruited at the Club and those within the apartment complex. As previously noted, the only major difference in procedures was that youths that did not participate in the Club were instructed to skip items related to Motivation for Involvement.

The entire 90-item questionnaire battery took approximately 20 minutes to complete depending on the age and level of education of the youths. For some participants, the questionnaires were administered in multiple sessions, allowing for enhanced attention span and motivation. All questionnaire responses were kept confidential. Youths were given a small incentive (i.e., soda, candy bar, pizza, etc.) for their participation in the study.

It was important to determine whether the youths recruited from the apartment complex were initially comparable to the youths recruited from the Club on various demographic indicators and the outcome variables. Several analyses were conducted to test for equivalence of groups. Chi-square tests were used to examine whether there were differences in demographics between the Club participants versus the youths recruited from the neighborhood. There were no significant differences between groups on gender or ethnicity. However, the youths attending the Club were more

likely to be from single-parent families than those who did not attend ($\chi^2 = 3.96$, $p < .05$). A *t*-test found no significant differences in age between groups, $t = .84$, $df = 133$; $p > .05$. These findings suggest that for the most part, these two groups had similar demographic profiles. There were significant differences, however, between these two groups on two outcome variables. These youths also had significantly lower scores on enjoyment in school, $t = 13.48$, $df = 138$, $p < .01$, and effort in school, $t = 17.65$, $df = 139$, $p < .01$. As expected, *t*-test analyses indicated that the youths recruited from the apartment complex participated at that Club with less frequency, $t = 10.51$, $df = 72$, $p < .01$. These differences must be noted when interpreting the study results.

Data Analyses

Multiple regression procedures examined the types of activities in which the youths took part in at the Club, as well as the underlying reasons behind youths' participation in the program. Overall relationships among variables were explored using Spearman rank correlations, the nonparametric equivalent of the Pearson product-moment correlation (Cohen & Cohen, 1983, p. 40). Finally, two analyses of covariance tests (MANCOVA; controlling for age) examined outcomes associated with Club participation.

RESULTS

Predictors of Participation in Boys and Girls Clubs: What Do Youths Do?

Data indicate that youths that participated in the Club engaged in varying types of activities. Specifically, youths reported they play in the games room (59%); do arts and crafts (33%); engage in recreation and sport activities (29%); were involved in life skills/prevention (28%); conduct service projects (20%); and participate in educational activities (17%). A multivariate regression analysis was employed to explore which of these activities most predicted overall monthly attendance at the Club. Six dummy variables were created noting why youths came to the Club, each taking a value of 0 or 1, depending on whether the youths indicated the program element as a reason for Club attendance.

The reasons for attendance were the independent variables (predictors) and monthly participation in the Club was the dependent variable. The multivariate analysis was significant, $F(6,132) = 6.50$, $p < .01$, indicating that the independent variables were related to overall attendance at the Club. These variables explained 23% of the variance in attendance. Table 1 displays beta coefficients yielded through the multiple regression analyses. Larger beta coefficients indicated stronger relationships between program involvement and the underlying motivator. Two of the univariate analyses were significant: Games room and sports/recreation.

Predictors of Participation in Boys and Girls Clubs: Why Do Youths Come?

Seven dummy variables were created that pertained to why youths come to the Club (i.e., friends, parents make me, etc.). Each dummy variable was coded with a value of 0 or 1, depending on whether the youths identified the particular reason as a motivation for attending. A multivariate regression was employed to explore how youths'

Table 1. Results of the Two Multiple Regressions Examining Attendance by Motivation and Type of Activity Followed by Univariate Analyses

Independent Variable	*Standardized Beta Coefficient*	*T*	*p*
Motivation to Participate; $F = 2.99$ (7,131).			
Parents make me	.25	2.96	.00
Adults there care	.03	.27	.79
Friends are there	.19	2.11	.04
Sports/recreation	.12	1.30	.20
Art projects	−.02	−.21	.83
Educational supports	−.06	−.63	.53
Service projects	.13	1.37	.17
Types of activities; $F = 6.50$ (6,132).			
Arts and crafts	−.07	.80	.42
Games room	.32	4.08	.00
Sports and recreation	.21	2.40	.02
Service projects	.12	1.40	.17
Life Skills/prevention programs	.09	.99	.32
Education	.02	.30	.77

motivation predicted overall attendance. The reasons for attending (e.g., friends, parents, activities, caring adults) were the independent variables (predictors) and overall monthly attendance in the Club was the dependent variable. The multivariate analysis was significant, $F(7,131) = 2.99$, $p < .01$, indicating that the independent variables were related to attendance at the Club. Thirteen percent of the variance in participation was explained by these variables. Table 1 displays beta coefficients yielded through the multiple regression analyses. Again, larger beta coefficients indicate stronger relationships. Two of the univariate analyses were significant: My parents make me and my friends are at the Club.

Relationships Among Variables

Table 2 presents the correlations among the various variables examined in the study. Several significant relationships were noted. Specifically, age was positively related to truancy, favorable attitudes toward cheating, and alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use. Age was negatively related to self-reported grades and effort in school. Overall monthly attendance at the Club was positively related to self-reported grades, enjoyment of school, and effort in school. Club participation was negatively related to favorable attitudes toward cheating and cigarette use. It also is noteworthy that there were many additional significant relationships among the dependent variables, thus indicating the occurrence of many coexisting risk factors and youths problem behaviors. This is similar to past research in this area (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2001). In addition, Table 3 provides an overview of the means and standards deviations among each participation group (high, moderate, low, and total sample).

Participation and Academic Indicators

A MANCOVA was conducted to explore the impact of participation on the various academic indicators, after controlling for age. Participation served as the independent

Table 2. Correlations Among Variables: Spearman's Rho

Spearman's rho	*Age*	*Participation*	*Grades*	*Truancy*	*Okay to Cheat*	*Enjoyment of School*	*Effort at School*	*30 Day Alcohol*	*30 Day Cigarette*	*30 Day Marijuana*
Age	1.00	−.11 (n = 134)	−.37** (n = 124)	.16 (n = 124)	.35** (n = 134)	−.35** (n = 131)	−.36** (n = 131)	.33** (n = 134)	.20** (n = 133)	.25** (n = 134)
Participation		1.000	.24** (n = 127)	−.09 (n = 126)	−.24** (n = 138)	.33** (n = 133)	.38** (n = 135)	−.14 (n = 137)	−.21* (n = 137)	−.06 (N = 137)
Grades			1.00	−.32** (n = 119)	−.28** (n = 126)	.26** (n = 122)	.50** (n = 123)	−.30* (N = 126)	−.23* (n = 126)	−.26** (N = 125)
Truancy				1.000	.14 (n = 125)	−.24** (n = 122)	−.17 (n = 122)	.40** (n = 125)	.26** (n = 125)	.18* (n = 125)
Okay to Cheat					1.00	−.37** (n = 133)	−.49** (n = 134)	.19* (n = 136)	.05 (n = 136)	.16 (n = 136)
Enjoyment of School						1.00	.47** (n = 131)	−.23** (n = 133)	−.19* (n = 132)	−.16 (n = 132)
Effort in School							1.00	−.28** (n = 133)	−.23** (n = 133)	−.28** (n = 133)
30 Day Alcohol								1.00	.33** (n = 135)	.50** (n = 136)
30 Day Cigarettes									1.00	.40** (n = 135)
30 Day Marijuana										1.00

Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

*Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations Across Participation Groups**

	Participation Groups			
Item	*Low*	*Moderate*	*High*	*Total*
Academic indicators				
1. Grades last year	3.97(1.10)	3.91(1.18)a	4.46(.96)a	4.07(1.12)
2. Truancy	1.61(2.21)b	.69(1.27)b	.96(1.64)	1.04(1.73)
3. Favorable attitudes toward cheating	.73(.80)cd	.42(.71)c	.25(.65)d	.47(.74)
4. Enjoyment of school	2.24(1.50)e	2.63(1.14)f	3.29(.90)ef	2.67(1.26)
5. Effort in school	3.00(.94)g	3.31(.93)h	3.85(.36)gh	3.35(.88)
Substance use indicators				
6. 30-Day alcohol use	.39(.97)ij	.09(.29)i	.11(.68)j	.19(.68)
7. 30-Day marijuana use	.22(.73)	.16(.83)	.34(1.41)	.23(.99)
8. 30-Day cigarette use	.12(.40)kl	.00(.00)k	.00(.00)l	.04(.23)

Note. *Letters indicate significant differences between groups.

variable, age as the covariate, and self-reported grades, truancy, attitudes toward cheating, enjoyment of school, and effort in school served as the dependent variables. As displayed in Table 4, significant main effects exist for Age, Participation, and the interaction between Age and Participation. Table 5 describes between-subjects results. Age was significantly related to all academic indicators. Participation was related to truancy, favorable attitudes toward cheating, enjoyment in school, and effort in school. The Interaction Variable (i.e., Age × Participation) was related to grades, favorable attitudes toward cheating, enjoyment of school, and effort in school. Statistically significant relationships were in the hypothesized directions. Differences among low, moderate, and high participation groups are presented in Table 2 and 3.

Participation and Substance Use

Similarly, a MANCOVA examined the impact of participation on substance use after controlling for age. Participation served as the independent variables, age as the

Table 4. Two Multiple Analyses of Covariances Examining Participation and Academic Indicators and Participation and Substance Use Indicators After Controlling for Age

	Pillai's Trace	*F*	*Hyp. df*	*Error df*	*p*
Academic indicators					
Intercept	.71	49.88	5	101	.00
Age	.27	7.37	5	101	.00
Participation	.27	3.21	5	101	.00
Substance use indicators					
Intercept	.04	1.87	3	125	.14
Age	.07	3.07	3	125	.03
Participation	.10	2.21	3	125	.04

Table 5. Between Subjects Effects Examining Academic Indicators

Source	*Dependent Variable*	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Corrected model	Grades	22.33	3	7.44	6.91	.00
	Truancy	28.62	3	9.54	3.42	.02
	Favorable attitudes toward cheating	11.29	3	3.76	8.26	.00
	Enjoyment of school	28.65	3	9.55	7.01	.00
	Effort in school	22.01	3	7.34	12.63	.00
Age × participation	Grades	137.21	1	137.21	127.40	.00
	Truancy	1.84	1	1.84	.66	.42
	Favorable attitudes toward cheating	3.39	1	3.39	7.44	.01
	Enjoyment of school	72.06	1	72.06	52.87	.00
	Effort in school	91.64	1	91.64	157.67	.00
Participation	Grades	4.74	2	2.37	2.20	.12
	Truancy	16.41	2	8.20	2.94	.05
	Favorable attitudes toward cheating	3.23	2	1.61	3.54	.03
	Enjoyment of school	15.19	2	7.59	5.57	.01
	Effort in school	10.11	2	5.05	8.69	.00
Age	Grades	16.52	1	16.52	15.34	.00
	Truancy	11.92	1	11.92	4.27	.04
	Favorable attitudes toward cheating	7.62	1	7.62	16.71	.00
	Enjoyment of school	11.92	1	11.92	8.74	.00
	Effort in school	10.71	1	10.71	18.43	.00

covariate, and 30-day alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use served as the dependent variables. Results of the analysis can be found in Tables 4 and 6. Significant main effects existed for Age, Participation, and the Interaction Variable (i.e., Age × Participation). Age was related to 30-day alcohol use. Participation was related to 30-day cigarette use. The Interaction Variable was related to 30-day alcohol use. Again, statistically significant relationships were in the hypothesized directions. The differences among low, moderate, and high participation groups are presented in Table 2 and 3.

Table 6. Between Subjects Effects Examining Substance Use Indicators

Source	*Dependent Variable*	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*
Corrected model	30-Day alcohol use	6.16	3	2.05	4.83	.00
	30-Day cigarette use	.55	3	.18	3.72	.01
	30-Day marijuana use	2.62	3	.87	.89	.45
Age × participation	30-Day alcohol use	2.24	1	2.24	5.27	.02
	30-Day cigarette use	.07	1	.07	1.49	.23
	30-Day marijuana use	.74	1	.74	.76	.39
Age	30-Day alcohol use	3.77	1	3.77	8.87	.00
	30-Day cigarette use	.13	1	.13	2.65	.11
	30-Day marijuana use	1.93	1	1.93	1.96	.16
Participation	30-Day alcohol use	2.18	2	1.09	2.57	.08
	30-Day cigarette use	.40	2	.20	4.03	.02
	30-Day marijuana use	.97	2	.48	.49	.61

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to address participation, a key issue in youth development programs. The results provide information about the ways in which youths participate in Clubs, what motivates their participation, as well as what outcomes are associated with participation.

Foremost, the results of the current study suggest that participation is related to enhanced protection among the youths who participate in the Club. Specifically, participation was related to lower levels of truancy, favorable attitudes toward cheating, and cigarette use; as well as increased enjoyment and effort in school. Increasing age was related to poorer grades, increased acceptance of cheating, decreased enjoyment of and effort in school, and increased alcohol use. These findings confirm past research suggesting that age is an important factor related to increased problem behaviors (Garmezy, 1985; McGee, Feehan, Williams, & Anderson, 1992; St. Pierre et al, 1997).

Additionally, it is interesting to note the significant interaction between age and participation main effects. Specifically, the interaction variable was related to enhanced grades and enjoyment of and effort in school; as well as decreased favorable attitudes toward cheating and alcohol use. These data suggest that participation in the Club was related to decreased risks and problem behaviors typically associated with increasing age level. This might suggest that as youths got older they might be more likely to be at risk for and engage in problem behaviors, yet participation in the Club might potentially protect these youths from this increasing likelihood.

In addition to these findings, regression analyses provide a better understanding of what "typical" BGCA participation looks like. The two activities that predicted overall monthly attendance were: (1) involvement in the games room; and (2) engagement in sports and recreation activities. In other words, Club participation among the youths in this study was primarily characterized by engagement in unstructured, recreational activities, as opposed to structured Club programs such as life skills classes, tutoring, or prevention programs (i.e., SMART and Project Learn). These findings are similar to past research indicating that youths primarily participate in recreational-based programs at Boys & Girls Clubs (Anderson-Butcher, 2000; Anderson-Butcher & Conroy, 2002). What is evident here, however, is that this "type" of participation is related to academic and substance use indicators, as supported through the statistical analyses. The findings highlight the importance of "play" activities at the Club. It confirms past research noting the positive impacts of physical activity, sport, and recreation participation on enhancing self-esteem, self-concept, leadership, and cooperation skills and decreasing the display of problem behaviors (see Collingwood, Reynolds, Kohl, Sloan, & Smith,1991; Gruber, 1986; Hastad, Segrave, Pangrazi, & Petersen, 1984; Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Iso-Ahola & Hatfield, 1986; Segrave & Hastad, 1982). As such, findings call for a better understanding of what benefits participation in more outcomes-based, structured prevention and educational programs might add. To say it another way, might additional benefits accrue as Clubs were able to get youths to engage in more intentional, skill-building types of activities?

Results also point to two additional motivators for participation: (1) Presence of friends at the Club; and (2) Parents' requirement of attendance. These findings are consistent with other research examining youths' motivation for participation, as peer relationships and friendships are important motivators underlying participation in youth development programs and sport (Quinn, 1999; Smith, 1999; Wankel & Sefton,

1989; Weiss & Ferrer-Caja, 2002). As well, although parents' requirement of attendance has not been explored, the importance of other parent involvement indicators such as parent reinforcement and support has been noted (Brown, 1985; Brown, Frankel, & Fennel, 1989). Strategies for recruiting and retaining youths' involvement must be mindful of these important motivators.

Limitations

Despite the encouraging findings, there are several limitations that need to be acknowledged. The study relied on youths' self-report and the psychometric properties of the measures were underdeveloped. These data are cross-sectional; therefore, relationships cannot be interpreted in terms of causation. We simply know that participation and age are related to academic performance and substance use indicators. Because youths were not randomly assigned to participate in the Club, a self-selection bias may have influenced the results. For instance, it could be that youths who perform better in school and engage in less risky behavior were more inclined to seek out participation in the Club and/or have parents that required them to attend (differences between youths recruited at the local apartment complex versus those recruited at the Club on enjoyment and effort in school may point to these issues).

Additionally, the study did not ascertain whether youths participated in other types of activities (i.e., other child care, sports, extracurriculars, fitness programs, etc.). Regarding nonattenders, we simply know that they were not attending the Club. It is possible that they were participating in programs provided by other youth development organizations, schools, or community-based organizations. It is expected, however, given the community in which they lived, that other types of participation were not likely. Nevertheless, future studies could include questions that provide a more representative picture of youths' out-of-school time activities.

Furthermore, the findings do point to the importance of involvement in "traditional," nonstructured Club programs. We do not know, however, what it is about this unstructured participation that makes the most difference for youths. It would be important to explore more specific program strategies utilized in unstructured programs, such as the establishment of relationships with caring adults and the promotion attachment and belonging to prosocial peers and organizations. Are these specific strategies what make the difference, or is it just that youths benefit from being "off the streets" in safe havens? Further, it would be important to begin exploring what specific program components (i.e., arts and crafts, education, service activities, leadership programs, etc.), and their underlying intervention strategies, have the most influence on the various outcome variables. The present study does not allow for a complete understanding of what the essence of participation is, it simply identifies involvement in sports and games room as the "typical" activity predicting attendance.

Future studies should explore issues related to dose of exposure, intensity of program involvement, and the strength of the programs (i.e., implementation fidelity). Clearly, there is a need for longitudinal research in this area, using random assignment or rigorous quasi-experimental designs to determine true impacts associated with participation. Despite these limitations, several implications may be drawn from the present research.

Implications

The results of this study suggest that overall participation in the Club is related to positive youth development. More specifically, youths in this study that were involved in "typical" Boys & Girls Club programs (i.e., unstructured, drop-in, recreational sport programs) seemed to gain benefits from this type of participation. Findings suggest that youths do not have to participate in structured BGCA programs such as SMART prevention programming and Project Learn to receive these benefits.

Additionally, these data raise some questions. To name a few, would Club participation have greater impacts on academic achievement if youths were participating in more structured, outcomes-oriented programming such as tutoring and/or homework classes? Would Club participation further decrease substance use if the youths were engaging in more life skill and prevention programs? Future program strategies that aim to increase youths' participation in more structured activities that have more targeted outcomes are recommended. Programs must be mindful, however, of the need to balance program attractiveness with program content, so youths will attend and at the same time gain valuable skills and assets that contribute to their positive development (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2002; Witt, 1997a; 1997b; Wright, Harwell, & Allen, 1998).

It also may be important to link these structured programs to "play" activities, thus increasing the likelihood that youths will attend. For instance, Tetelman (1996, p. 301) suggested that in the New Jersey Project, recreation is used as the "umbrella that overarches the more intense core services" such as job and employment training and prevention programming. Similarly, Lawson, Anderson-Butcher, Barkdull, and Byrnes (2001) and Anderson-Butcher et al. (2002) suggest that recreation and sport serve as important hooks or magnets that initially serve to attract youths to the programs. Program leaders at BGCA and other youth development organizations should strategize with these motivators, as well as parents and friends, in mind.

Using these strategies may be of more importance when attempting to recruit and retain teen populations. The present findings suggest that Club participation may combat risks associated with increased age. Research shows, however, that youths are less likely to participate in these types of programs as they age (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992; Gould, 1987; Quinn, 1999). It remains a continual challenge for program staff to capture adolescents' interests and sustain their on-going participation. It seems clear that the motivators of recreation, sport, and friends are essential program strategies necessary to especially engage harder-to-reach adolescent populations.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, this study points to the important role of the BGCA in promoting positive youth development. Overall participation in the Club was related to enhanced academic achievement and school engagement. Club involvement was especially important for adolescent populations, as participation was related to decreased risks and problem behaviors associated with increasing age. Furthermore, programs must strive to capture and engage youths by (a) having unstructured games room activities; (b) offering sports and recreation; (c) creating and maintaining friendship networks; and (d) hooking parents. These four areas were most predictive of youths' Club participation. This study also points to the need for youths to engage in more structured,

outcomes-oriented programs at Clubs. It is very likely that greater benefits may accrue as youths participate in more structured activities. Given the results of this study, the importance of youth development organizations such as the BGCA as contexts for positive development should not be underestimated.

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